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RETURN

FUEL CONTROLLER.

TUESDAY, June 12, 1917.

The Committee of the Privy Council have had before them a report dated 8th June, 1917, from the Minister of Trade and Commerce, submitting the following observations on the coal situation in Canada:—

Last winter very considerable difficulty and hardship were experienced owing to shortage of supplies and congestion of transport, resulting in increased prices to consumers, serious temporary curtailment of production in factories, and much discomfort and privation in the homes of the poorer classes in towns and cities. These causes bid fair to continue and with increasing force during the present season, and are added to by the scarcity of labour for the mines, the increasing difficulties in transport, and the added demand for coal in both the United States and Canada owing to the ever-increasing exigencies of the war.

At the present moment the outlook for the coming season gives cause for grave anxiety and calls for prompt and efficient action if subsequent shortage and its consequent privations are to be avoided. The Quebec district, which formerly drew for its needs for railways and factories, some 2,000,000 tons of bituminous coal from Nova Scotia mines, cannot estimate on more than 200,000 tons from that source. Nearly all the prospective output of these mines will be required for local needs, bunkering purposes and the use of the Intercolonial railway. This transfers the supply of this deficiency to United States mines, whilst in Middle Canada the demands have to be met, if at all, by drawing upon United States sources.

Here two difficulties are encountered. First the high price and shortage of supply in the United States mines, caused by extraordinary demands and reduced output owing to scarcity of labour. The entrance of the United States into the war and the vast preparations necessary for the equipment of sea and land forces and the growing needs of the Allies call for vastly increased output of coal and added restraint of export for other than war purposes. In the second place transport by land and water is daily becoming more inadequate compared to the increasing volume of freights to be moved, and freight costs are continually increasing.

In the western Prairie Provinces the supply has been diminished by strikes in some of the mines and in respect to those working the output is restricted by the tendency to neglect putting in orders during the summer season, and consequent failure to haul coal to consuming centres during the slack and favourable season.

The Minister represents that it seems, therefore, to be necessary that a competent fuel controller should be appointed:—

1. To examine into the coal situation of Eastern and Middle Canada from the Atlantic coast to the Rockies.

(a) As to the probable demands for consumption therein for the coming season.

(b) As to the output of Canadian coal that can be relied upon towards meeting those demands and what, if any, measures can be adopted to increase this output.

(c) As to the sources outside of Canada from which the deficiency can be provided, and the possibility of obtaining the necessary amount,

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(d) As to the possibility of providing sufficient transport for the carriage of both Canadian and foreign coal from the points of production to the distributing points.

(e) As to the possibility of early and continuous co-operation between producers, carriers and consumers, with a view to economizing and facilitating the needed supply.

2. That in the course of and in connection with such investigation, he be authorized to confer with and co-ordinate the different interests with a view to ensure so far as possible a sufficient supply of coal for Canadian requirements during the approaching autumn and winter season and from time to time to report and recommend to the Government ways and means for effecting the same.

The Minister recommends that Charles A. Magrath be appointed Fuel Controller and be charged with carrying out the purposes outlined in the foregoing memorandum, and that all expenses incurred by him for clerical assistance and travelling and living expenses in connection therewith constitute a charge upon and be paid from the War Appropriation Funds.

The Committee concur in the foregoing and submit the same for approval.

RODOLPHE BOUDREAU,

Clerk of the Privy Council.